

Four Loko: Not a New Problem!!!

The Beginning, the Problems, the Evolution...

& Where We Are Today!

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Four Loko Overview:

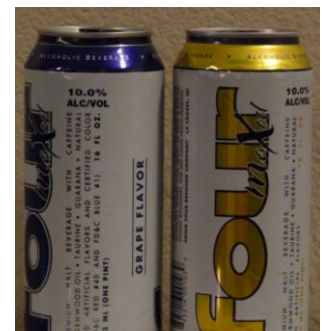
The alcoholic energy drink, Four Loko, has received a lot of national attention lately, due to incidents across the country involving high school and college-age students. What many people don't realize is that Four Loko, and its original name, Four Maxed, have been sold in most communities for several years! I have personally been tracking these drinks, along with their bright colors, fruity flavors, price points, sales, marketing, and youth popularity, for the last three years. I have also kept the original cans that I found on the shelves several years ago. Below are some trends and facts that you might not have been aware of.

History:

In early 2009, I located the drink that I will later refer to as Four Loko, in Idaho and other surrounding states. At that time it was called Four Maxed. When this drink first arrived, it was packaged in a white 16 oz can with a simple trim color of blue or gold (see photo #1). This can really didn't stand out on the shelves next to others like Joose, Sparks and Tilt. This particular drink was one of the first alcoholic energy drinks that rose to the level of 10% alcohol by volume (alc. /vol.). At 10%, this particular alcoholic drink was the equivalent of more than two beers in one can. What also created more separation from a standard beer was this drink promoted non-traditional flavors such as Grape and Citrus. This was also one of the only alcoholic energy drinks that contained wormwood oil. After I located this drink on a store shelf in Lewiston, Idaho (northern Idaho) I went to my home and began researching the Four Maxed website www.drinkfour.com. Interestingly enough, the product was out on the shelves even before the website was up and running. Once the website went live, it would take a few seconds to load. During this time the website would count up .02, .04, .06, .08, .10 the same as someone's blood alcohol content (BAC). Also, many people (including myself) thought that the website name of www.drinkfour.com was encouraging people to consume four cans of their product. Once on the website you would easily notice very young looking girls and off road vehicles helping to promote the drink. In stores the drink was being sold for \$1.00-\$1.40 which is significantly less than the same amount of a non-alcoholic energy drinks.

I believe, during late 2008 - early 2009, Four Maxed didn't get nearly as much community or media attention due to the fact that Sparks (made by Miller/Coors) and Tilt (made by Anheuser Busch) were getting most of the headlines for their agreement to reformulate their drinks from alcoholic energy drinks to alcopops. They did this mainly by taking caffeine out of their drinks. Meanwhile, Four Loko was on its way to our communities.

In mid 2009, the drink Four Loko began to arrive on many store shelves in Idaho and other surrounding states. This drink started at 11% alc. / vol. and had approximately 4 different flavors. Different from their previous product, this can was 23.5 oz (1/3 larger than the previous can). Also, the can looked completely different from their



previous Four Maxed cans. The Four Loko cans have bright colors, larger print, and “some funky writing”. Also during this same time frame they continued to put more flavors and bright colored cans onto the market.

Where We Are Today:

In early 2010, Four Loko had 7 different flavors, all in the 23.5 oz can. Later in 2010, Four Loko again bumped their alcohol content – this time to 12%! Due to the size of the can and the alcohol content this is equivalent to 5 traditional beers! At this time one of the newer popular flavors of Four Loko among our youth was “Watermelon”. This sweet and fruity drink comes in a bright green can (see photo #2) and is still very popular among young females. Currently, Four Loko has 8 different flavors (Fruit Punch, Watermelon, Cranberry Lemonade, Grape, Lemonade, Orange, Blue Raspberry and Lemon Lime).



Four Loko has been, by far, the most aggressive alcoholic energy drink rapidly increasing these characteristics: size of can, bright colors, multiple flavors, high alcohol content, and low price points.

All of their drinks are popular among youth and young adults. One of the popular culture shifts that I have seen on the street and during student presentations, such as assemblies, is the popularity of the drink among young men. Traditionally, alcoholic energy drinks have been popular with females because of the bright colors, fruity flavors, and lack of the bitter taste. Now because of the high alcohol content this drink has become very popular with young men. Some underage drinkers are trying to get drunk as fast as they can. Having “crack in a can” or “liquid cocaine” as some kids like

to call it, or being able to drink 5 beers at once, is very appealing to those who want to get drunk. Also, having a drink that includes a stimulant adds to the popularity. Many youth believe this drink doesn’t act as a depressant, but actually gives them more energy and they are now a wide awake drunk. Let’s take it one step further. Now you place a 23.5 oz can on a shelf next to a 16 oz. can that has less alcohol content, is a standard looking can, and less volume...I think we all know which one underage drinkers would choose! Interestingly enough when I talk to youth who have been consuming Four Loko, I ask them how much they have had to drink. Frequently, they will reply “1 or 2 beers”. What they mean is “1 or 2 cans of beer” which is actually “5-10 beers”. Many youth don’t realize or understand that because of the high alcohol content, they are consuming much more alcohol than a standard beer. Don’t forget that ounce for ounce alcoholic energy drinks are less expensive than the non-alcoholic version. Depending on where you live, you can purchase a Four Loko drink for around \$2.00.

Conclusion:

A large percentage of our educators, parents, law enforcement and community members don’t know that this drink even exists. Everyone has walked past one of these drinks at some point. During many of the presentations that I have given, most don’t realize that other alcoholic energy drinks, such as Joose and CORE have also been sold in their local stores since 2006. These can also contain up to 12% alcohol. We also need to educate our youth on the harms of alcoholic energy drinks. Knowledge is power and we need to educate our communities about the different alcoholic energy drinks and alcopops that are being sold!